



# The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency

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Volume 1

## Permanency for Iowa's Children

Introduction: Iowa Blueprint for Forever Families

The permanency Blueprint is a document developed by **Children's Justice State Council and Child Welfare Advisory Committee**. It is intended as a guide to identify practice strategies and system changes that will improve permanency for

improve permanency practice.

This *Blue Sheet* will provide an overview of the principles and key practices identified in the permanency Blueprint. Future Blue Sheets will focus on practices that support

"Permanency is critical for the well-being of the youth we serve not only to begin to resolve a current crisis, but to provide meaningful relationships that last a lifetime."

*Iowa Supreme Court Justice Brent Appel*

Iowa's children. The permanency Blueprint provides a critique of current practice and system issues, while outlining principles and key practices to promote permanency.

*The Blue Sheet* is intended to help supervisors, social workers, providers, and other child welfare partners as a practical guide to

permanency.

The Blue Sheet will be used:

- In conjunction with practice seminars for supervisors
- In general practice discussion in your unit, and
- In specific case discussion.

Iowa Children's Justice will issue a concurrent newsletter focusing on promoting permanency for the court.

## Life of the Case

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The "life of the case" model will be used in future Blue Sheets to point out critical information in utilizing practice skills at certain points during the child welfare system involvement with the family:

- Intake
- Engaging
- Assessing
- Case Planning
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback
- Safe Case Closure

Iowa Child Welfare Practice Model is foundational to the Blueprint and the CFSR Program Improvement Plan. Strategies are consistent with both. You can find them at [www.dhs.state.ia.us](http://www.dhs.state.ia.us)

Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families is frequently quoted or paraphrased in this newsletter. You are encouraged to read it: <http://www.iowacourts.gov/wfData/files/ChildrensJustice/PermanencySummit/BlueprintforPermanency.pdf>

# Principles of Permanency Practice

## URGENCY • DIVERSITY • EMPOWERMENT • ACCOUNTABILITY • SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

**Urgency:** Social Workers are instrumental in creating the attitude of treating key decisions and progress toward permanency as if each child's welfare depended on it...because it does. Urgency is *determination* to stay focused on results and deadlines until permanency is achieved. Early in the life of the case, it is critical for all interveners to identify the conditions necessary for safe case closure. This ensures that everyone involved has a clear and shared understanding of "what it will take"... what changes must occur within the family so that parental functioning can adequately sustain safety and well-being for the child.

**Diversity:** All interactions with the family must reflect respect for their culture, race, ethnicity, language, and religion, and focus on maintaining family connections. Keeping children within their family is one way of respecting and maintaining a child's cultural heritage. Recent federal legislation, Fostering Connections, is aimed at promoting permanency and improved outcomes for children in foster care through support for kinship care, family connections, and direct access to federal resources for Indian Tribes.

**Empowerment:** Engaging families and youth by developing a genuine and respectful relationship is key to effective practice. Also key to effective practice is allowing the family to be full partners in decision making....decisions about how to keep the child safe, placement options, service options, and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. Families are empowered through effective family team decision-making meetings where their views and opinions are valued by the team and they are asked about their strengths and unmet needs. Being honest about the dual responsibility you have to assure safety of the child and your genuine desire to help the family contributes to an ongoing positive helping relationship.

**Accountability:** We are accountable to the families with whom we work. Services and supports to the family must be strength-based, fair, responsive, and effective.

**Shared Responsibility:** Multiple systems and the community must work together to identify and support permanent relationships for children. The Blueprint states: "Achieving permanence for children and youth is not just

### Iowa's Permanency Vision

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*Every child deserves a  
forever family.*

A forever or permanent family offers safe, stable, and committed parenting, unconditional love and lifelong support, and legal family membership status. Ideally, permanency is achieved through preserving or reunifying the child's original family. If neither of these is possible due to safety concerns, permanency can also be the result of legal guardianship or adoption by kin or other caring and committed adults.

the responsibility of the Department of Human Services or of the Court alone. It requires an unequivocal commitment... and everyone working together to ensure that every young person served ... leaves care with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever."

# Framework for Permanency Practice

## FAMILY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT • FAMILY PRESERVATION PLACEMENT AND REUNIFICATION ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP • TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

The Blueprint reminds us that permanency is “vital for healthy development and well-being of children.” There are three aspects to permanency:

- Legal – a legally established relationship (adoption, guardianship, birth family).
- Relational – an emotional attachment between youth, caregivers, and other family and kin.
- Cultural – a continuous connection to family, tradition, race, ethnicity, culture, language and religion.”<sup>1</sup>

The Blueprint framework is organized around five key areas of practice:

1. Family and Youth Engagement
2. Family Preservation
3. Placement and Reunification
4. Adoption and Guardianship
5. Transitioning to Adulthood

### **Family/Youth Engagement:**

The Blueprint recommends implementing “authentic family and youth engagement through the use of family team meetings, regular face-to-face visits, and

youth-centered practice at the individual practice level.”

“Outcomes improve when youth and their parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision.”

### **Family Preservation:**

Practice strategies promoted by the Blueprint to preserve families include:

- Using research-based safety and risk assessment tools to inform decision making,
- Providing appropriate strategies and supports to prevent placement and keep children safe at home.
- Increasing the use of effective evidence-based family approaches and engagement strategies.

### **Placement and**

**Reunification:** “Every effort should be made to minimize trauma to a child or youth” while keeping them safe in care. Reunification is promoted by effective family interaction

including meaningful visits that enhance the child and parent relationship. If a child cannot remain at home safely, relatives or kin are the preferred option for placement. Family search strategies need to be easily accessible to those with placement responsibility. To improve stability for a child, effective supports should be provided to kin caretakers during placement and families upon reunification.

### **Adoption and Guardianship:**

Children who cannot return home need a “forever family.” Adoption and Guardianship offer an opportunity for children to have legal and relational permanence. Through adoption, children and families have the same rights and responsibilities as if the child were born into the family. Guardianship by kin enhances connection to family, tradition, race, ethnicity, culture, language and religion.

**Transition to Adulthood:** It’s never too late to help a child achieve legal and relational permanence. Youth should be involved in shared decision making and in preparing for adulthood by involving them in their plan from intake through

<sup>1</sup> University of Iowa School of Social Work—National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, “Improving Outcomes for Youth in Transition” Training Program, 2009.

safe case closure. “Efforts to achieve permanence for even the oldest youth in care must continue, through ongoing discussion with youth and work with birth families, by establishing or maintaining healthy relationships with relatives (including siblings)

and fictive kin, and by engaging in aggressive family finding efforts with youth who have lost connections to birth family.” The Blueprint reminds us that “attention must be given to preparing young people to live independently by assuring that they have normal growing up

experiences, such as getting a driver’s license, holding a part-time job, applying to college, and opening a bank account – experiences that young people in intact families routinely navigate with the help of their parents.”

## Race Equity—Disproportionality and Cultural Competency

“We cannot successfully address permanency in this state without addressing disproportionality. Currently, efforts are underway to reduce disproportionality and desperate outcomes in the Courts Catalyzing Change site(s); Iowa Breakthrough Series Collaborative sites; Georgetown Breakthrough Series Collaborative; and the Juvenile delinquency Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) initiative. Lessons learned from these efforts and those of other communities should be applied in all practice.”

“Specifically:

- Youth and their families must be actively involved in the creation of and progression of their plan. This plan must be individualized and recognize cultural differences.
- Everyone in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems must continue to demand accurate, timely data that includes race and ethnicity information. That data must be analyzed and acted upon using a race equity lens or frame of reference.
- Everyone in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems must work to ensure there is an array of culturally appropriate service options for youth and families.
- Everyone in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems must provide services in a culturally competent manner.
- Youth, families, and professionals of color must be engaged in all policy and practice development, and ensure that all decision-making groups include members that are representative of the racial and ethnic populations we serve.

Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families”

## Evaluating Your Permanency Practice<sup>2</sup>

1. Has a trust-based working relationship been established with the child or youth and family? How is the child or youth and family engaged as active participants in the planning process?
2. Does the family team understand the child and family situation well enough to provide supports and services to address the individual needs? Are you getting the desired results?
3. Are services provided competently, on time, and consistent with individual needs of the family and child or youth? If you are not getting the desired results, is the family team meeting to revise the strategies for change?
4. Is the permanency goal the most appropriate for this child and is progress being made in meeting that goal?
5. Is the child currently living with caregivers who the child and family team believes will last forever? If not, are active efforts being made to reunify the child with the family or find an alternative permanent and stable living arrangement that will provide legal, relational and cultural permanence for the child?

Note: While the Blueprint does not specifically mention the transfer of custody to another parent as a pathway to permanency, it is the first option to consider; prior to consideration of other relatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Guide to Reflective Practice, Human Systems and Outcomes, Inc., September, 2001